

I taught man to create the future
and, through that creation, free the
past.

Socrates

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Contemplating the Future

Though I have made an effort to provide an outline of the future in broad terms, readers must have noticed how difficult it is to imagine it at higher resolutions. The possible variations are so manifold and human imagination is so weak that it could never contain them. If we further consider the fact that the validity of the methodology I have used here to analyze the driving forces of local and global conflicts is not very high – mainly because futurist researchers now do not have a more reliable methodology that could provide probable, not only possible, futures – the end result will be a rather blurred picture of the future. Still, because we must wrap this up somehow, I would like to end this book in the same way I started it – with an exercise in introspection, knowing that the imagined details of the story I shall now unfold may turn out rather scant. Though I believe that the Geographic Approach will identify the major vectors of the history of Israel's region, I am certain that reality will eventually exceed everything I can imagine.

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Let us now imagine a boy who has turned 13 in the summer of 2010. He was born in 1997, when the world was euphoric and philosophers predicted the end of history, speaking of an era without wars as capitalism and its values spread all over the world. The 1990s provided the only global superpower with a flourishing economy and geopolitical satisfaction, and the US was left to manage the world order almost exclusively. Most experts believed that those years were a small sample of what the world and humanity are yet to experience in the 21st century. Many believed that they marked the end of the struggle between East and West, capitalism and socialism, Christianity and Islam, and that no one would ever be able to challenge the only remaining superpower. In short, they expected the end of history as Fukuyama envisioned it.

Nevertheless, by the time our boy turned ten, the world experienced changes that were unimaginable when he was born. When he was only four, the world watched live on TV how one of the worst terrorist attacks in the history of humanity buried some 3,000 people under the rubble of two New York City skyscrapers. The boy was still very young and probably unable to comprehend that in that moment, the world was forever altered. For that was when the global complacency and belief in peace, fraternity, and thriving economies were smashed to smithereens. That terror attack was followed by a series of wars launched by the US; it conquered Iraq without a hitch, toppled Saddam's regime, and found itself sucked into endless battles throughout the Middle East. It conducted open and covert wars in Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Libya, Egypt, Syria and of course against the bizarre regime that started grabbing much media space – the Iranian ayatollahs, who were constantly threatening to annihilate pro-West Arab states. The ayatollahs called the US “the great Satan” and, of course, Israel “the little Satan.”

When our hero was two, his parents, both Israeli hi-tech experts, were sent by a well-known Israeli company to California's Silicon

Valley to bolster its marketing efforts and promote an Internet application the company had developed. When that assignment ended in August 2001, the family returned to Israel so that their son could attend a local kindergarten. They flew back just before the 9/11 disaster of 2001, when airports were still exciting places. Everyone was quite relaxed. Their American friends were even allowed to escort them to the flight gate. The boy still remembers how one of his father's friends gave him a toy gun and whispered in his ear that he hoped this would be the only gun he would ever hold.

The boy remembered that his parents wanted to stay in California. Later, he understood that it was because the Valley was the dreamland of every Israeli computer expert, but his father was recalled and offered a top executive position with one of his company's more prestigious units. He remembered that his family settled in a complex of some 500 single-story houses that they called a kibbutz. He clearly remembers how his family and friends used to gather around the swimming pool there, having barbecues as if they were in an Israeli public park, and how everyone spoke Hebrew. He even remembers how some of his parents' friends used to nod their heads and gaze sadly at them, though he did not know why. The Second Intifada was raging throughout Israel then, and no one could understand why the family had decided to return to Israel at that time and had not waited for things to cool down.

When he was nine, however, reality started making a real impression on him. In July 2006, a war started against Hizbullah in Lebanon and northern Israel was hit with barrages of missiles. Relatives from the north came to stay with his family until the waves of rockets ended. He remembered these days as a time of friendship and family reunions. He had a similar experience when, in December 2008, the IDF attacked the Gaza Strip in an attempt to stop the firing of mortars and rockets at southern Israel, which had

lasted intermittently for some eight years. It was then that our boy decided he would not live in Israel all his life.

In 2010, our hero celebrated his Bar-Mitzvah. Friends and relatives came from near and far to celebrate with him. He was excited when he stood on the podium of the synagogue and read the Bible passages he was assigned. On that occasion, his grandmother told him all about his family's past. She told him about her father, who had been an American pilot in World War Two and had stayed in Europe to help Holocaust survivors immigrate to Israel, after which he came to Israel himself and took part in the formation of the Israeli Air Force. She told him about her mother, who had been born in Morocco, and met her future husband in post war immigration camp in Europe. She asked the boy to forever remember his grand-grandfather, and to understand that the State of Israel had been built with much effort and hard labor, and should never be taken for granted. She insisted that one day, he too will have to play his part in helping to guarantee the continued existence of the Jewish nation in its land, saying she hoped he would do the right thing when the time came.

In 2012, Mayan prophecies of apocalypse seemed ridiculous. The world had survived and not been washed away. Our boy was now 15, and his father has again been offered a post in Silicon Valley. The Americans had a hard time since the economic meltdown of 2008, and though there were indications that the economy was "just about" to pull out of the recession, things did not improve. Though his parents were not too happy to relocate, our teenager now had a say, and he wanted to return to the Valley. His sister, four years younger, was convinced that they were off to some Disneyland for youths and adults.

Being rather different from the US economy, the Israeli market was only marginally damaged by the global meltdown. The father's company was doing very well in local and Asian markets, which is why he was not too pleased when he was offered a senior position in

a place that was in deep trouble. He feared that he would be expected to perform miracles, and that this was an attempt to distance him from the main arena of future business developments. Yet, encouraged by his children, he decided to accept the offer. Democratic candidate Barack Obama was running for his second term and things were looking up. Relating to the feeling that the US was finally recovering, the father secretly hoped that this new situation could create some fine opportunities for him.

When they arrived in the Valley, however, it turned out that the situation was even worse than they had expected. The US economy was in a slump. Many of the boy's old Israeli friends had left, and he had a hard time finding new ones. Though it was not easy to adjust, the first year went by fast, but then he was called to report to the Israel Defense Forces for the first of three rounds of tests. His parents wondered: should they send him for those tests or should he perhaps avoid his Israeli army service altogether?

Another year went by, and the second call-up orders arrived. By then, the youth had made up his mind. He did not want to be drafted and decided not to return to Israel. His family had recently been granted the status of permanent US residency, a Green Card, and he intended to make all he could of that. He thought that three years of military service in Israel would be a waste of time. It would be better to go to an American college and start creating his future.

In 2016, he was accepted to Stanford University in the Valley. It was not easy for his parents to pay his \$60,000 annual tuition, but they were proud of him and did their best. His father extended his contract by another three years, and though he was unable to actually stabilize the company he managed, things turned out well enough to provide for his son's needs.

Meanwhile, Israel's economy was blooming and the parent company that had sent his father to the US was branching out to new markets. The US market, however, was going from bad to worse,

experiencing a crisis it had not known since 1929. At this point, his father's company decided to close the Valley branch and fired him, along with the others. The parents were forced to return to Israel and attempt to find their place in the Israeli market, which by then – after a decade of growth – had become one of the world's top 15 most developed economies.

Since the youth was about to start his senior year in college, there was no point in his returning to Israel just then. His parents left, taking his younger sister with them. He was expected to join them after graduation.

It is 2019. Our boy has just turned 22 and, as a graduate of one of the world's best universities, he receives a job offer from Boeing. He had started studying electrical engineering when the profession was in high demand, but now that he has graduated, the field is in a slump, and he considers himself lucky to even get a job offer. He decides to stay in the US and joins the department of Boeing that produces UAVs. Tension with Russia was peaking and the Pentagon had signed a major contract with Boeing for the production of UAVs.

In 2020, his sister enlists with the IDF. Our hero, the big brother, follows his little sister's progress from afar and worries for her, but the girl is a fighter. She joins the naval commando while news from the Middle East does not bode well. Warmongering Syria and the Hizbullah threaten Israel's northern border while a growing number of Israelis believe that Israel should strike hard and regain its eroded power of deterrence. Everyone is certain that an Israeli strike is imminent.

Meanwhile, fighting starts between the Turks and the Russians in the Caucasus region. The Turks ask for urgent US aid, but America does not want to send its troops there just yet. The recently reelected Republican president knows that to avoid direct intervention, the US must do something to satisfy the Turks and urge them to deploy more of their own troops against the Russians. So the president decides

to provide the Turks with cutting-edge American technology: hypersonic jets, the prime strategic yet secret weapon of the 2020s.

Our boy, now a grown man, had been fortunate enough to work on a Boeing project responsible for developing that technology. Soon after the skirmishes started, the company sends him with a team of US experts to help the Turkish Army integrate the new weapon. In truth, Boeing twisted his arm. He had to choose: go to Turkey, or quit. And so, fate places him in the Caucasus, where he trains Turkish operators to use the hypersonic machines. Finding himself away from his home and family in Israel, he starts looking for a place where he could find some Jewish warmth and Israeli friends. Since his actual posting is classified, he would have to travel to Istanbul for the weekends, disguised as an American businessman in search of business opportunities. Deep in his heart he hopes that, spending time with the warm Jewish community of Istanbul, he could even find his mate there.

In 2022, he has been stationed in Turkey for the past two years. The Middle East war is escalating. Unable to withstand domestic pressure, the Israeli government decides to launch a military operation in Lebanon to stop the incoming rockets. Contrary to initial estimates by the IDF General Staff, the enemy actually intensifies its rocket fire, which presents Israel with the old dilemma: it could stop the fighting, which would make it the loser in the asymmetric war, or it could go around Lebanon and attack from the north, dazzling Hizbullah and Syria. After ten weeks of attrition in which northern Israel's civilian centers came under barrages of missiles, the IDF top brass holds an urgent discussion that will shape regional history in the 21st century. They decide to invade Syria from the Mediterranean, which should make Syria deploy its forces there, and at the same time they decide to send ground and armored forces overland to Damascus. The Israelis hope this would shock the Syrian decision makers into ceasing to fire missiles at central and northern Israel.

Our friend is watching that from Turkey. He has lost touch with his sister, but in his heart he knows that she is fighting on the shores of Lebanon. He prays for her, but then the phone rings in the middle of the night, startling him. Nothing but bad news can come at this hour. His commander reports that he was asked to notify him that his sister was wounded; her left hand was severed while she was on a secret mission. She is hospitalized in Haifa.

He decides to get on a plane and arrives in Israel. He realizes that the country has changed over the past decade, which was excellent for its economy. He envies his old friends who are living close to their families. It strikes him that he has been lonely in Turkey for too long and decides to propose to his girlfriend as soon as he returns there. The entire Jewish community of Istanbul attends the wedding.

By 2030, our friend is practically a Turk. He speaks perfect Turkish and his two children attend a Jewish school in Istanbul. Turkish economy has been blooming recently, particularly since the war in the Caucasus ended and Russia was defeated in 2028. Turkey's dominant influence in the Middle East is a political and economic blessing for the country, as it also is for the Jews of Istanbul. Ever since Israel conquered Syrian and Lebanese territories, ties between Israel and Turkey have tightened and they have started friendly negotiations to end that occupation. Israel wants Turkey to guarantee that Syria and Lebanon disarm themselves of their missiles.

Israel is beginning to feel the burden that holding such vast territories imposes on its national infrastructure, but recent years have seen right-wing hardliners come to power. They conduct intense negotiations, and their insistence provokes escalating anti-Semitism against Turkish Jews. It is not easy being a Jew in Turkey of the 2030s. Israel and the US are still Turkey's official allies, but this is not reflected on the street.

In 2032, the man we are watching already has a dozen years working for Boeing under his belt. His eldest son is about to start

school, and he wants him to attend first grade in the US, not Turkey. The Turks seize every opportunity they have to drive Americans out, and after a decade of maintaining troops in Turkey, the US is considering their removal. One day, over a Sabbath meal with his in-laws, our friend decides to discuss his intention to move his family to the US. The wife's parents are not pleased. They are an ancient family in Istanbul and since Turkey has recently regained the geopolitical status it deserves, they argue, he should keep his family's future tied to Turkey's future if he cares for the greater family. They are far from convinced when he tells them he feels that Turkey's future is actually very obscure, or that a Muslim state is no place for Jews in the 21st century. Even when he reminds them of a series of harassments that the Jewish community in Istanbul has been subject to, they are not convinced. Eventually, he simply says that his position with Boeing will not be safe for much longer. His in-laws promise him a job in the family business if indeed he gets fired. They have been trading in ceramic materials in markets in the Middle East and the Far East, assuring him that he and his family will never starve. He is still not amenable to their advice, and so, without their blessing, he takes his wife and children and returns to Palo Alto in the California Silicon Valley.

It is now 2038, and the relationship between Turkey and the US has turned grim. The US has started restricting Turkey's geopolitical moves, and the new regional superpower has retaliated with secret struggles against regional and global US interests. As part of its anti-American strategy, it has banned Americans from visiting Turkey and vice versa. Our friend is gradually losing touch with his wife's family, but his ties with his Israeli family are greatly improving. In Israel, his father is now ill and in a wheelchair, and resents the fact that his son is so far away. Our friend misses his family and decides that they should celebrate his son's Bar-Mitzvah in Israel.

Meanwhile, his sister has made a fantastic recovery. It is nearly

impossible to see that her left hand is actually a bionic prosthesis. She is married now and has four children, and her brother in America cannot understand why a 21st-century couple should even want so many children. Most of his associates have a single child, if any. He cannot even understand how she functions in her condition, but when he arrives in Israel, he is amazed to see that tiny robot, supplied by the IDF Rehabilitation Department, follow her every order – from doing the laundry to serving dinner.

The Bar-Mitzvah party is very exciting. His wife's family could not attend, being restricted by the Turkish authorities. The next day, his sister invites him over to meet some of her friends and admire her robot. She even programs the robot to identify her guests' voices for their amusement. One of the friends he meets is an old acquaintance of his from when they were children. He will never forget that meeting because before he left, the friend asked a single question that changed our man's life: how would you feel, he said, about joining the Israeli defense establishment – the Mossad, to be precise – and developing a system to monitor Turkey's space activities? You are familiar with the Turkish Air Force and culture, the friend said, and you speak the language. Would you like to help Israel understand Turkey's intentions for the regional future? If you accept our offer, the friend adds, we could help your wife's family leave Turkey. It is an offer he cannot refuse; together, he and his wife decide to move to Israel with their children.

It is 2043 and, as the atmosphere in Israel grows tense, his eldest joins the army. For the first time in history, Israel is courted by two superpowers, the US and Turkey, though their interests now conflict, and they are headed on a collision course. For the past three decades, the US has groomed and supported Turkey, encouraging it to play a central and constructive role in the Middle East, but now Turkey has grown so strong that it has become the sworn enemy of the US. While the US cautiously tries to feel out the situation, the Turks

have long realized that if they do not stand up against US interests in the Middle East, Turkey will never become prominent among the region's nations. Both superpowers, however, realize that Israel is an important player and both need it on their side to maintain their influence in the Levant.

And so, as Turkey and the US compete both overtly and covertly, the terms for Israel's withdrawal from Syria, Lebanon, Judea, and Samaria are created. Israel is willing to withdraw in return for a comprehensive peace accord that the two superpowers will guarantee, militarily and diplomatically. On the one hand, Turkey is seriously pressuring failing Arab regimes in the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula to accept Israel as an equal state in the region, strongly promoting an agreement that would place Israel under its influence. The Turks believe that Israel would be grateful if it succeeds in creating a real reconciliation with the entire Arab world, and if the Arab world now acknowledge it as the nation state of the Jewish people. On the other hand, the US is willing to vouch for Israel's military security, hoping the security ties between the two states will keep Israel under American influence.

At the end of 2048, as Israel marks its centennial, Ankara hosts the signing of elaborate agreements between Israel and the majority of the Arab states that a mere 100 years previously had been determined to push its residents into the sea. The celebrations might have gone without a hitch, had not a US base on the moon just been attacked by unknown terrorists. Some 5,000 US crew and family members were killed in the attack, which cast a heavy pall over the US. American representation at the Ankara ceremony, therefore, was very minimal.

The Iranians could not be convinced to join these agreements, particularly not after the humiliation they had suffered at Israel's hands in 2021. They will not forget it, they have patience, and they believe they will have their revenge one day. But that is for the future to tell.